

# ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

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## **Texas educator cites skills for NLR post (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)**

LITTLE ROCK — Kelly E. Rodgers Jr., a Texas educator now seeking to return to his central Arkansas roots, describes himself as a transformational leader, one who identifies a need, articulates a vision and motivates others to buy into that vision to accomplish the job.

The North Little Rock School Board interviewed Rodgers, 56, superintendent of the 4,250-student Terrell, Texas, Independent School District, on Friday for the top job in the North Little Rock system. He was the fifth candidate to be interviewed for the job now held by Ken Kirspe, who will retire from the 9,000-student district at the end of this school year.

The board previously interviewed Bobby Acklin, the North Little Rock district's assistant superintendent for desegregation; Rhonda Dickey, the district's director of secondary education; Larry Smith, superintendent of the White Hall School District; and Belinda Shook, superintendent of the Beebe School District.

School Board President Scott Teague said Friday that he anticipates that board members will take at least the weekend to absorb the "volumes" of information they have received during the interviews before deciding the next step in the search process.

In an interview Friday with the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette, Rodgers said he lived as a young child in North Little Rock's Levy community before his family moved to Little Rock, where he graduated in 1975 from Parkview High.

A saxophone player in high school, Rodgers earned a degree in music education from Henderson State University and parlayed that into a band director's job in the Texarkana, Texas, school district and into other teacher and administrative jobs in four additional districts throughout Texas, including a combined 10 years as a superintendent in Center, Texas, and now in Terrell.

He would bring the skills learned in those jobs to North Little Rock, he said.

"I bring together groups and collaborate, and focus on goals and strategies and outcomes," Rodgers said. "I have experience in researching and finding solutions to problems such as how to work out funding" for district facilities.

Rodgers cited his efforts to build in Terrell a district wide, kindergarten-through-12thgrade program in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, or STEM, that will more fully support Terrell's industrial/manufacturing economy.

The STEM district wide initiative, which is still in its early stages, is supported with the recently built career and technical education center on the high school campus that took voter approval for some of the funding, Rodgers said.

Nearly nine out of every 10 Terrell students are taking a course in career and technical education.

"That's where we get into the project-based learning and STEM," he said, noting that the North Little Rock district is moving toward more hands-on learning.

"Our school district is focusing heavily on that because we are between 75 and 80 percent economically disadvantaged," he continued. "This focus - because of the area and what the community wanted - is on transportation, logistics, manufacturing, engineering, buildings and trade, and construction. The students can come out with a certification and go right to work, or go on to college and pursue a degree."

Darla Pollard, the Terrell district's assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction and technical education, said Rodgers is pushing into the 21st century a district that when he started had very little technology and relied heavily on teacher lectures as a way to deliver instruction

Pollard also described Rodgers as a courageous leader and one of integrity who is working to make education relevant for students. He's an advocate for teachers and supporting teachers in what they need for their jobs, she added, but he's also willing to have "tough conversations" to ensure teachers are working for students.

Carlton Tidwell, executive vice president of the Terrell Chamber of Commerce and the parent of one graduate and one current student of the district, noted that Rodgers is a past chairman of the chamber's board.

"He was a great motivator and really led our chamber well," Tidwell said.

As for the school system, Tidwell said Rodgers has done a good job managing the school district.

"My kids have been very successful in the school district," he said. "As parents, we have been very pleased."

Rodgers said he was proud of the fact that during his tenure the Terrell district has cut student discipline infractions in half, from a high of 4,000 a year to 2,000, at least in part because of the implementation of a system that emphasizes positive behavior.

He also said that the district, partly as the result of a staffing audit, was able to streamline the number of positions in the district without laying off staff members, which has helped lead to teacher salaries that closely approach the salaries in larger Texas systems.

Terrell is in Kaufman County, about 25 miles east of Dallas. It is made up of four elementary schools, one middle school and one high school as well as an alternative school.

Family obligations, two young grandchildren in Batesville and a sense that the North Little Rock district would be a good fit for his skills caused Rodgers to consider returning to the Natural State, he said.

Rodgers' father, the late Kelly Rodgers, was a businessman in downtown Little Rock. His mother, Norma Rodgers, worked in the Little Rock School District's administration building. His sister Karen is a Little Rock School District teacher.

Rodgers has a master's degree in educational administration from East Texas State University and has done additional postgraduate studies.

In addition to working in the Texarkana, Texas, public school system, he taught two years in Pleasant Grove, Texas, before becoming an assistant principal in 1988 and principal in 1990 in that district.

In 1997 he became assistant superintendent in DeKalb, Texas, where his responsibilities included helping to rebuild elementary and high school campuses that were struck by a 1999 tornado. His first superintendent's job in 2002 was in the 2,650-student Center, Texas, system. He became superintendent in Terrell in 2007.

Rodgers met his wife, Gail, who is a retired teacher, while both were students at Henderson State. The couple have three adult sons who were all Eagle Boy Scouts and have earned master's degrees.

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### **Ex-bookkeeper avoids prison in school theft (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)**

LITTLE ROCK — A former Little Rock School District bookkeeper was sentenced to five years of probation Friday and is to repay the district \$9,000 that she stole from an education program for the homeless.

Linda Annette Porter Jones pleaded guilty to felony theft in October. She has two prior theft convictions, including one from 1995 for stealing from the school district, and she could have been sentenced to 20 years in prison.

But Pulaski County Circuit Judge Barry Sims said he would follow sentencing guidelines that recommended probation for the 52-year-old, who suffers from anemia, hepatitis C and autoimmune disorders.

The judge said he was impressed with her supporters, most notably North Little Rock minister Larry Ross, who presides over Arkansas' 37 Christian Methodist Episcopal churches.

In a letter to the judge, Ross said Jones and her husband, Elijah, are faithful members of the College Station church and asked the judge to show her some compassion. He acknowledged that he is not familiar with the details of the theft but was asked to write a support letter by Jones' pastor, the Rev. Shelby Taylor.

"As far as I know, her character is impeccable, other than what her current circumstances reveal," the letter states. "We will continue to work with and support Mrs. Linda Jones, her husband and family through the church. We all deserve a second chance, and hopefully Mrs. Jones will receive one."

But Sims said Jones would get no further chances if she does not live up to the terms of her sentence, which includes paying the money back at \$150 a month, a fine of \$1,000 and 50 hours of community service.

"I'll give her one chance. This is your only opportunity to stay out of the pen," the judge said. "I will accept no excuses."

The mother of three made no statement. School officials declined to participate in the sentencing, deputy prosecutor Lauren White told the judge.

Jones was an 18-year district employee when she retired on medical grounds in July 2011 after about seven months on medical leave, according to court files.

The last six years of her employment with the school district involved bookkeeping for the homeless program, with the authority to use a bank card to buy supplies for the office and homeless families.

The card account is reviewed monthly by the district's financial office and approved by Jones' supervisor, Nina Scaife. When an internal audit raised questions about some of the spending, Scaife told police that she only signed off on two statements and that Jones must have forged the others.

When Jones went on leave in January 2011, Scaife reviewed the card statements and found unauthorized purchases for a camcorder, antivirus software, toys and a lot of printer ink cartridges, according to a court report.

Jones had purchased cartridges at an "alarming rate," the report states, citing an example of eight purchased in one month for a total of \$530.

Police documented 72 purchases between January 2008 and December 2010 from Target, Gap, Hobby Lobby and Wal-Mart that appeared to be for personal items or items that never made it to her office.

In a series of purchases at four Target stores, according to the report, Jones would collect two receipts for each purchase. She would turn one receipt to the school district then use the second one to return the item she had purchased.

In 1995, she pleaded guilty to theft by deception from the school district in exchange for five years of probation, a \$2,000 fine with \$12,000 in restitution. Details of that theft were not available but court records show the restitution was paid to Blue Cross/Blue Shield. According to court records, she had paid \$10,718 as of January 2012.

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### **U of A in Battle with Washington County Over Property Taxes (KARK-Channel 4)**

The University of Arkansas has filed a lawsuit against Washington County and now the Fayetteville School District joined the suit on the side of the county.

"You have to prove that you have a right to a tax exemption beyond a reasonable doubt, so it's a very high burden of proof," said Washington County Attorney George Butler.

Butler said Washington County's Assessor decided to review all tax exemptions last summer. During his evaluation, he decided to deny several University of Arkansas' tax exemptions. Now the university has filed suit.

"They're claiming that they are immune from taxes because they are an entity of the state," said Butler.

In the lawsuit, the school claims several pieces of property they own, while not currently being used for educational purposes, are part of a master plan so they should not have to pay property taxes. But Butler believes UA should have to pay.

"The Supreme Court has said that you can't rent out property and maintain your tax exempt status, they are renting some of their property out to private vendors which is clearly prohibited."

According to Alan Wilbourn with Fayetteville Public Schools, the district has a lot to lose in this case.

"On an average year, it would impact us to about \$165,000 a year, which basically equates to three full time teachers."

Butler said money collected through property taxes is allotted by the county, and the Fayetteville School District receives the majority of those dollars. Thursday night, the school board unanimously decided to join the lawsuit. Now, it is Washington County and Fayetteville Schools versus the University of Arkansas. But Wilbourn said the district respects the intent of UA's suit, and does not want this one disagreement to tarnish their relationship.

"Trying to be good stewards of the tax dollars, we decided that the sensible thing to do was to ask the court if we could intervene," said Wilbourn.

The board also unanimously approved the hiring of Jack Butt, of the Davis, Clark, Butt, Carithers & Taylor Law Firm to serve as legal counsel for the litigation.

According to the Washington County assessor, the university has been paying property taxes on certain parcels of land but is now asking to be exempt from all property taxes. He also said the last two years, the school has paid its taxes under protest meaning if they win the case they would get that money back.

Attorney Butler said a judge will hear the case in 2013, but he believes it will ultimately end up in front of the Arkansas Supreme Court. He said the final ruling will probably be made in about two years.

Our crews reached out to the University of Arkansas, and were not able to get an interview on Thursday.

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### **Little Rock Schools Putting Own Security Measures in Place (KARK-Channel 4)**

The Little Rock School District Board of Directors failed to pass a proposal Thursday night that would have added more armed security on its campuses, but instead approved more unarmed guards.

But one school is putting its own security measures in place, like Carver Magnet School in Little Rock without being buzzed in.

Unless you're staff, they use a key card.

"It was important for us to provide some security measures for our parents, our staff and our students and given the situation where we are downtown," said Acting Principal and Science Lab Instructor, Gene Williams.

the school also has an unarmed security guard... adding to the sense of security for parents and students

"I am very thankful and grateful and happy that it's here," added ReAn Grace Jaffey, whose son is in the 5th grade at Carver.

"Happy so nobody can try to come and get me, feels Rufus, ReAn's son.

Some on the Little Rock School Board wanted to extend that feeling of security, by adding one armed guard at each school in the district, but Thursday night the proposal failed.

However, most people we spoke to would feel safer with an armed guard present on campuses.

"It would add that extra protection that teachers need and it would provide security to the students, said parent Felicia Tatum-Rogers.

Armed guards or not, Carver Magnet says security will continue to be a top priority.

"What we want to do is keep our kids happy and safe so they can learn," said Williams.

A Bill will be introduced next week by Arkansas Legislatures, asking that a study be conducted on just how ready our schools are across the state, in the event of a violent situation on campus.

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## **Bismarck Teacher Arrested for Sexual Indecency with Child (KARK-Channel 4)**

A Bismarck teacher has been arrested on probable cause for sexual indecency with a child.

Mark Clampett was taken into custody on Thursday and released on a \$5,000 bond.

The case has been sent to the Hot Spring County Prosecutor's office for review.

Superintendent Susan Stewart-Harper says Clampett has been put on suspension pending the outcome of the case.

His next court date will be Feb. 20.

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## **Educator rejects plea deal in teacher testing case (AP)**

MEMPHIS, Tenn. (AP) — A longtime Memphis educator rejected a plea deal Friday on charges that he masterminded a yearslong scheme to help teachers cheat on qualification tests, with his attorney saying the man is “all prayed up” and wants to face trial.

Clarence Mumford Sr. has acknowledged some allegations against him in talks with prosecutors, and his attorney said he rejected the deal in part because it didn’t reward him for his cooperation with authorities. Attorney Coleman Garrett told a judge in December that he expected Mumford to change his plea from not guilty to more than 60 fraud and conspiracy charges.

He faces between two to 20 years in prison on each count if convicted; the plea deal called for roughly nine to 11 years total.

Prosecutors say teachers in Tennessee, Mississippi and Arkansas paid Mumford \$1,500 to \$3,000 to have ringers pass the tests for them. That fee included fake driver’s licenses Mumford made for the test-takers. The passing Praxis test scores were then used to help people get jobs as teachers.

Six people already have pleaded guilty, and five other teachers have indicated they plan to do so.

Mumford told U.S. District Judge John Fowlkes that he has a right to be judged fairly and that he was not coerced or influenced by anyone in rejecting the deal.

“I made this decision based solely on me and my faith,” said Mumford, adding that he has high blood pressure and diabetes.

Garrett, Mumford’s court-appointed attorney, asked his 59-year old client if he knew what his decision meant.

“Do you realize that if you go to trial and are convicted in this case that it is tantamount to a life sentence?” Garrett asked.

“Yes sir,” Mumford said.

Fowlkes set a trial date of March 25. Prosecutor John Fabian said the trial could take two weeks. There are 40 to 50 potential witnesses and thousands of pages of discovery in the case.

Authorities say the scheme, which allegedly ran from 1995 to 2010, affected hundreds, if not thousands, of public school students who ended up being taught by unqualified instructors. After they were indicted, some teachers were fired or suspended, while others remained employed by their school systems.

Educational Testing Services, which writes and administers the Praxis examinations, has said the company discovered the cheating in June 2009, conducted an investigation and canceled scores. The company began meeting with authorities to turn over the information later that year.

Outside the courtroom, Garrett told reporters that Mumford, a former assistant principal and counselor for Memphis City Schools, believes that two years in prison is an appropriate sentence.

Garrett also suggested that prosecutors did not offer a more lenient sentence in the plea deal because Mumford did not lead them to higher-ranking co-conspirators.

"They wanted a high-profile person" who may have been involved in the scheme, like a superintendent, Garrett said. Prosecutors have publicly said all along that Mumford was the ringleader.

Garrett said Mumford did not think his actions were criminal and considered it a moonlighting operation to earn extra income. Garrett said he asked Mumford if he was prepared to face the consequences of a trial.

"He said, 'I am because I am all prayed up,'" Garrett said.

The lawyer also noted that many of the teachers who have pleaded guilty could be called as witnesses at trial, and his client may be the only one to face prison time.

"That's likely. Everybody walks except him," Garrett said. "Strange."

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### **Berryville School Board to vote on whether to renew Byrd's contract Monday (Carroll County News)**

BERRYVILLE -- School Board members will decide Monday whether Berryville Superintendent Randy Byrd will retain his job for another year.

Board members have been busily filling out evaluation forms in recent weeks. At Monday's meeting, the results of this work will be discussed with Byrd, and the board will vote on whether to extend his contract.

The superintendent was hired in 2008. In the years since, board members have credited him with helping improve the district's performance on standardized tests and saving taxpayers money.

Board Member Vonda Bailey said test scores had steadily improved since 2008. Last year, the district was one of only 35, out of some 239 in Arkansas, to be labeled as "achieving" under the state's new accountability system.

Bailey also credited Byrd with successfully completing a major construction program -- which included converting the old band facility into a field house and constructing six new buildings -- and with saving taxpayers an estimated \$2 million by refinancing the district's debt.

Still, Byrd has also had critics.

Several candidates in last year's school elections ran on platforms antagonistic to the superintendent, and, in mid-September, Byrd was criticized for incorporating a \$1,000 employee raise into the district's annual budget.

Board Member Jeff Miles and others speculated the move was a political calculation intended to sway the results of the upcoming elections -- a charge Byrd has denied.

Regardless, several new faces did emerge victorious at the polls, and they have since clashed heads with Byrd and other board members on a number of issues.

At the new board's first meeting, freshly elected members Todd Howard and Sherri Plumlee sparred with the superintendent over the proper length of returning board member Lydia King's term.

More recently, some in the community have expressed distaste with the district's handling of football coach Eric Daniel, who was allegedly told late last year that he would not be allowed to continue coaching through 2013, despite the fact that his contract is still in effect.

About a dozen football players from Berryville High School showed up at a school board meeting in December to speak on behalf of their embattled leader. However, they were not allowed to do so -- and were told they could not address the board, the young men said, because they were juveniles.

District policy does state that personnel issues may not be addressed during public session, and there are very specific instructions -- including requesting the right to speak at least six days in advance -- for those who wish to address the board. However, the policy says nothing about age.

Board members have remained mum on their intentions regarding Monday's vote; it is illegal to discuss pending personnel decisions outside of executive session. However, several school administrators predicted a close call.

Those who are curious about the result can attend Monday's meeting, to be held at 6 p.m. in the Intermediate School Cafetorium, in Berryville.